

INVASIVE SPECIES FACT SHEET

Japanese stilt grass (*Microstegium vimineum*)

Description: *Microstegium* is an annual shade-loving plant in the Grass family (Poaceae). Stems are narrow and can grow up to 59 inches in favorable habitats. Leaves are alternate and typically 4 inches long and 1/2 inch wide, depending on the size of the plant. There are small hairs on both sides of each leaf and where the leaf meets the stem. A distinctive silvery stripe of reflective hairs runs down the middle of the upper leaf surface. The flowers grow on slender tips in the form of spikelets. Spikelets are usually in pairs 1/5 inch long. Plants typically flower in August-September.



photo by: Chris Evans

Plants produce hundreds of small yellow to red seeds that mature within a two week period in September-October and are thought to spread by surface water and animals. Seeds stay viable in the seed bank for up to seven years. The plants may also spread by rooting at the nodes along the stem.

Microstegium may be mistaken for cutgrass (*Leersia virginica*) or knotweed (*Polygonum persicaria*). Cutgrass has distinctly longer leaves and shorter spikelets than *Microstegium*. Knotweed has pale to dark pink flowers and glossy black nutlets.

Habitat: *Microstegium* is native to Asia. *Microstegium* competes best in moist, partially shady conditions where natural or artificial disturbance has occurred. Once established, it may move into undisturbed natural areas. It is found in a variety of environments including stream banks, river bluffs, floodplains, forested wetlands, moist woodlands, early successional fields, uplands, thickets, roadside ditches, utility corridors, lawns and gardens.

Distribution: *Microstegium* is found throughout the eastern United States, particularly in the Appalachian region. In Kentucky it is widespread throughout the state.

Threat: *Microstegium*'s adaptability and versatility in a variety of conditions make it particularly threatening. Its long seed viability means that control methods must be repeated annually for at least seven years. Seeds from one plant can recolonize an area. On fertile mesic sites, *Microstegium* can replace competing ground vegetation within 3-5 years.

Control: For small populations, hand-pulling is an acceptable control method. The plants should be pulled late in the summer prior to or just after flowering in order to avoid new plants germinating from the seed bank.

Mechanical control is effective for small or large populations. Use a string trimmer or mower to cut the plants as close to the ground as possible. Cutting should be done when the plants are in flower before seeds are produced or in early August. Plants cut any earlier may have time to produce new seed heads in the axils of lower leaves.

Herbicide treatments may be applied late in the growing season before the plants set seed. Apply a 2% solution of glyphosate (Roundup) and water; or a 1.5% solution of sethoxydin, 1% nonphytotoxic vegetable-based oil and water to all foliage until it is wet. Do not apply if rainfall is expected within two hours following application. All treatments should be repeated annually for at least seven years to deplete the seed bank.



Prepared by:
Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
801 Schenkel Lane Frankfort, KY 40601 · (502) 573-2886 · www.naturepreserves.ky.gov

